

Q and A for Pre-Hospital EMS Providers Regarding Possible Anthrax Exposure

1) How can I get information about bioterrorism and emergency response protocols?

Pre-hospital EMS providers should familiarize themselves with advisories for providers from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) at (<http://www.state.ma.us/dph>).

2) What should I do if I am asked to respond to a possible anthrax exposure and there is a suspicious package or substance at the scene?

- Absent any known cases of anthrax, credible threats, or information regarding specific targets anywhere in Massachusetts, it is essential to exercise common sense in dealing with the public's concern about suspicious mail, packages, objects or other materials.
- Urge calm – exposure to anthrax does not present an immediate threat of injury, it is not spread from person to person, and, if necessary, treatment is available.
- Help determine the level of possible health risk, as outlined in the MDPH Clinical Advisory on Responding to Concerns about Anthrax. If there is a question, the MDPH 24-hour toll-free telephone information line is available at 1-866-627-7968.

3) How do I treat a person who believes he or she has been exposed to anthrax?

- Urge calm – and assure the individual that exposure to anthrax does not present an immediate threat of injury, anthrax is not spread from person to person, and treatment is available and effective if started early.
- Observe Body Substance Isolation precautions at all times, including the use of mask and gloves.
- Asymptomatic individuals, unless otherwise ill or injured, will not require transportation to the hospital. If there has been a **known** exposure to anthrax, they should be instructed to seek medical evaluation immediately. Otherwise, consult the DPH clinical advisories on anthrax for guidance in assessing possible health risk.

4) Are there special decontamination procedures required for a possible exposure to anthrax?

No. Potentially contaminated materials should be dealt with in a manner consistent with personal safety. Chlorine bleach solutions are effective for destroying spores on equipment and vehicles. Individuals should wash their clothes in the normal manner. Showering with soap and water will effectively remove skin and hair contamination.

5) What should I do if I think that either I or my equipment may have been exposed to material contaminated with anthrax?

- EMS personnel who may have been exposed to any hazardous or toxic material should immediately notify their employer and follow appropriate workplace procedures.
- Routine decontamination protocols for equipment and vehicles should be followed before returning to them to service (see question #3 above).